

Defining Turkey Today

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Turkey has been in the news lately; occasioned by Pope Benedict XVI's visit to the country, as well as its persistent attempt to join the European Union. Unfortunately, in dealing with the latter subject, not much clear information comes from the mainline news media to help us understand what the implications would be if a 70-million Muslim country became a full member of the EU. I would like to cite one example from the 28 November 2006 issue of **The Wall Street Journal**. It published an article with the title **The West's Eastern Front**, written by Hugh Pope, the author of **Sons of the Conquerors: The Rise of the Turkic World** (Overlook Duckworth, 2005).

Mr. Pope began by describing the plight of Turkey as it seeks to join the EU:

“If the much-bruised Turks agonize long and loud about when they'll ever be accepted as Europeans, the Europeans seem willfully blind to the Turks. Another crisis looms in the long-running negotiations over Turkey's possible membership of the European Union, this time over the conveniently distracting issue of access to Turkish ports for Cypriot ships. Meanwhile the reigning pope, who wants to reclaim Europe for Christianity to the exclusion of the Turks, today touches down in this Muslim land. So it's worth thinking again about who the Turks are, what they want, and how helpful to Europe their practice of Islam really is.”

It does not take long for the discerning reader to notice that Mr. Pope is very sympathetic to the “plight” of the Turks, who are eager to be accepted as **Europeans**; and of their country joining the EU. He referred to “*the conveniently distracting issue of access to Turkish ports for Cypriot ships,*” as if it were a minor or insignificant matter to Cyprus! He glossed over the fact of Turkey's brutal invasion of that Island in July 1974, which resulted in the expulsion of over 100,000 Greek Cypriots from their homes. They were forced to find shelter among their people in the southern part of the island. It is indeed a very serious flaw in the reporting and historiography of Hugh Pope.

The main thesis of the author is to be located in his attempt to “**Europeanize**” the Turks in order to facilitate Turkey's entry into the EU. I would like to summarize and analyse his thesis under two of his points:

First, that Turkey is geographically a part of Europe; and second, Turks are mainly of European stock. Therefore, Turkey should be admitted without delay to the European Union, and Turks must no longer be considered as non-Europeans.

First, then, Mr. Pope argues that “*The land of modern Turkey has always been part in, part out of Europe. The Roman Empire included most of today's Turkey, which has also gone by other names like Anatolia or Asia Minor. The most easterly Roman forts are inside Georgia on the foothills of the Caucasus Mountains. To the southeast, the main*

Roman customs houses were along the Euphrates -- roughly where the Kurdish-majority areas of Turkey begin today."

Well, granted that the Roman Empire ruled present-day Turkey, plus most of the Middle East; does that imply that these areas became *ipso facto* a part of Europe? The fact that Britain ruled India for two centuries did not make India a European country. And hard as the French tried, for 100 years, to make Algeria part and parcel of France, they finally had to forsake that dream, at a very high cost.

The article continued to advance the claim that Turkey does belong to Europe:

"The subsequent Turkish conquest of Anatolia, and two sieges of Vienna, has not always meant a historic exclusion from Europe. The Ottomans had strategic alliances with France and Britain, among others. They were briefly part of the "Concert of Europe" in the late 19th century, were thought of in decline as the "Sick Man of Europe" (not Asia) and were the allies of Germany and Austria in World War I. In the Cold War, Turkey joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and guarded a whole third of Europe's front line with the Warsaw Pact."

Here again, Mr. Pope is manipulating certain historical facts to advance his thesis that Turkey has always been considered as part of Europe. The occupation of huge areas of Eastern and Central Europe by the Ottoman Turks, and their attempt to seize Vienna both in the 16th and 17th centuries, did not transform their empire into a European one. Their alliance with Germany and Austria in WWI, and their membership in NATO after WWII, did in no way Europeanize their land.

Referring to Ottoman Turkey, during the 19th century, as the "Sick Man of Europe" did not alter the fact that it was and remained at its very core, **an Islamic Empire**, while it was in the process of decline and disintegration.

Let us now examine the second thesis of Mr. Pope, **Turks are mainly of European stock. Therefore, Turkey should be admitted without delay to the European Union, and Turks must no longer be considered as non-Europeans.**

"Arguments that Turks are somehow ethnically Asiatic and non-European also hold little water..."

Furthermore, the 70 million people in modern Turkey may be Turkic in name and language, but are not so genetically pure. The main influx of Central Asian Turks to Turkey ended in the 13th century. Overall it seems to have added only about 10% of the population to the existing muddle of ancient Anatolian populations. Western Turkey, at least, is not much different from other Eastern European members of the European Union, where Bulgars, Finns and Hungarians also have origins in the eastern steppe. Turkey's Kurds, meanwhile, speak an Indo-European language."

Hugh Pope seems to be totally oblivious of the fact that though the majority of Turks today are not racially Asiatic, this fact has no relevance to the subject of their identity.

The basic worldview of the Turks is totally different from the European worldview. When the Ottoman Turks embraced Islam while serving as mercenaries for the weak Abbasid caliphs, they became the staunchest defenders of Sunni Islam. They managed to push the boundaries of their new faith into areas that Arab Muslims never managed to conquer. I refer to the gradual occupation of the heartland of the Byzantine Empire, the entry into the Balkans, and their great conquest of Constantinople in 1453. Not content with becoming Sultans in their expanding empire, they managed to assume the leadership of the entire Islamic Umma and thus the role of Caliphs.

The author of the article proceeded to add:

“Nobody doubts, however, that Europe's cold shoulder to Turkey is mainly due to its Muslim identity. As a cardinal in 2004, Pope Benedict XVI put this argument in terms of Turkey as being ‘in permanent contrast to Europe.’ But Europe cannot just wish Islam away. Some 15 million to 20 million Muslims already make up nearly 5% of the EU's population; that number includes 3.5 million Turks. Europe is deluding itself if it thinks it can isolate itself from engagement with not just Turkey but its whole Islamic backyard around the Mediterranean Sea.”

I agree with the first part of the above paragraph. During the last fifty years Europeans have had a first-hand experience with the presence of large Islamic communities which have not and cannot assimilate into a European liberal culture. If Europeans are unable to cope with 5% of the EU's population which is Islamic, wouldn't their problems be exacerbated if Turkey joined the EU and added another 70 million Muslims? It is proper for Europeans, whose birthrate is at an alarmingly low rate, to wonder about the impact of an increase in the Muslim population within their borders. It is not a matter of *“some European opinion leaders who treat a ‘clash of civilizations’ as inevitable,”* as Mr. Pope claims, it's rather a matter of the very survival of European civilization.

Near the end of the article, the author wrote:

“Turkey started its acrobatic effort to assimilate European culture in the early, 19th-century Ottoman Empire. In the 1920s, the present Turkish Republic took Europe as its model for almost everything, since back then Europe equaled modern progress. The new state dumped almost all the hallowed pillars of Islamic culture: Islamic law, dervish lodges, even the Muslim caliphate.”

The above words reveal an alarming ignorance of Turkey's history since the death of Kemal Ataturk in 1938. Here are the facts. Under the founder of the Turkish Republic, some drastic measures were taken in order to secularize the country and to distance it from its deep Islamic culture. So, Ataturk abolished the Caliphate in 1924, and indeed as Mr. Pope wrote, *“the present Turkish Republic took Europe as its model for almost everything, since back then Europe equaled modern progress.”*

Ataturk changed the Arabic script that had been used for centuries, and substituted for it a simple phonetic Latin script, thus enabling the majority of Turks to become literate. The

traditional Islamic Call to Prayer, *Allahu Akbar*, was changed into its Turkish equivalent; *Tanru Boyuk*. The yearly *hajj* to Mecca could no longer be undertaken by practicing Muslims. Men were not allowed to wear the traditional *fez*, and women could no longer wear the veil. I could go on enumerating the revolutionary changes that were forced upon the Turkish populace, especially in Anatolia.

However, not long after the death of Ataturk, things began to change. I noticed that personally in July 1949. I was changing buses at a depot in Tripoli, Lebanon. It was located in a large indoor walled space. While waiting for my bus to arrive, another vehicle came in with a large group of Turkish *hajjis*. They alighted, most likely for a rest, before continuing their long journey to Turkey. They were all weary, and could not communicate with the staff at the depot as they knew no Arabic at all. I don't recall exactly how I struck up a conversation with one of the pilgrims, using my little knowledge of Turkish. He asked me in which direction was the *qibla*, i.e. the direction toward Mecca. I pointed to the south, and he thanked me. I realized by that encounter that the prohibition that Ataturk had imposed on his people not to perform the *hajj*, one of the main pillars of their faith, was no longer in force. Furthermore, I learned that the call to prayer, was now being chanted in Arabic, and not in Turkish.

Fast forward to the 1990s. While on a visit to Turkey, I went into the Blue Mosque in Istanbul, and noticed right away, that a Turkish sheikh was chanting a chapter of the Qur'an in Arabic, albeit his pronunciation of the words left much to be desired!

And here we are in the early years of the Third Millennium, and Turkey has an Islamic Prime Minister in the person of Recep Erdogan. Slowly, but surely, Turkey is going back to its Islamic roots. Mustapha Kemal Ataturk would not recognize his country as the symbols of Islam creep back slowly, but steadily!

Hugh Pope ended his article by beating-up on Samuel Huntington's "**Clash of Civilizations**" theory. "*Rudyard Kipling's old saying that 'East is East and West is West' -- or its modern incarnation, 'the clash of civilizations' -- is not the right paradigm for Turkey, which feels increasingly confident as part of both. The West is now all over the East and the East is firmly camped in the West.*"

This mantra has become the slogan of the Multiculturalists, who are not able to comprehend that Islam and Islamic civilization, are incompatible with Western civilization. Deny it as much as you want, the 1400-year history of Islam displays a monolithic and imperialistic worldview, anchored in an unchangeable Divine Revelation. With the beginning of the West's decline after WWI, and the end of European colonialism, Islam has resumed its *futuh*, accomplishing it by immigration and demographic explosion; and by subversion and terrorism. It is astonishing that such a misleading article could appear in a responsible Western newspaper. As a student of Islam put it in his response to my email, "*Thnx for the forward...pity about the Turkophile article... one needs clear-thinking, not muddying the waters as that fellow did.*"

Whenever I come across Western writers who enthusiastically endorse Turkey's admission to the EU, while remaining silent about its refusal to acknowledge the Armenian Genocide, I refuse to take their works seriously. And I thank God for such writers as V. S. Naipaul who saw and described the impact of Islam on all its conquered peoples. To end my article, I quote from the **Prologue** of his book, **Beyond Belief: Islamic Excursions among Converted People**, published in 1998, by Random House, New York.

“Islam is in its origins an Arab religion. Everyone not an Arab who is a Muslim is a convert. Islam is not simply a matter of conscience or private belief. It makes imperial demands. A convert's worldview alters. His holy places are in Arab lands; his language is Arabic. His idea of history alters. He rejects his own; he becomes, whether he likes it or not, a part of the Arab story. The convert has to turn away from everything that is his. The disturbance for societies is immense, and even after a thousand years can remain unresolved; the turning away has to be done again and again. People develop fantasies about who and what they are; and in the Islam of the converted countries there is an element of neurosis and nihilism. These countries can be easily set on the boil.” P. xi